

What Does the Word Say?
Session 36: The infallibility of the Bible: Part III
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Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine the doctrine of the infallibility of the Bible. In our previous sessions we have made several points: First, the Bible is infallible because God is its author, and he is infallible. Second, that this is a critically important doctrine because without it our faith is, ultimately, based on subjectivism. And, third, the idea that Scripture *alone* is to be our authority was the formal cause of the reformation, which further emphasizes the importance of this issue. Dr. Spencer, how do you want to begin today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to start by saying that in holding up the Bible as the ultimate authority for life, we are not in *any* way opposing science, history, or any other human endeavor to gain knowledge; in fact, we encourage them. God created us with the ability and desire to understand the world around us. We just need to remember that the Bible is our only *infallible* source of information. But, we should certainly try to understand as much of the world around us as we can and to put that information to good use in fulfilling what is sometimes called the creation mandate.

Marc Roby: For those listeners who may not be familiar with that term, let me explain that the creation mandate refers to God's command to Adam and Even in Genesis 1:28, where we read that God, "blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" ¹

Dr. Spencer: That's right. The theologian John Murray, in his book *Principles of Conduct*, speaks even more generally of the creation ordinances, which include filling and subduing the earth, labor, the weekly sabbath, marriage and more. He wrote, "The whole earth is full of God's glory. The chief incentive in subduing the earth and the chief end to be promoted by it would have been the discovery and exhibition of the manifold wisdom and power of God."² He says it "would have been" because this command was given before the fall. But, he then goes on to show that the creation ordinances did not cease with the fall, so making God's manifold glory manifest should still be our main goal.

Marc Roby: Which agrees with the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The answer to the first question of the catechism says, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."³

Dr. Spencer: The catechism and Murray agree because both are biblical. But, in addition, there are other secondary purposes for man to learn how to properly manage and use the earth's

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² John Murray, *The Principles of Conduct*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957, pp 37-38

³ WSC, Q1

resources. For example, as the population grows it is necessary for our technology to get better in order to be able to feed everyone.

The current population of the earth could not possibly be supported if we had not greatly increased our ability to grow food. Modern farms are dramatically more efficient in producing food than they were just 50 years ago, let alone a thousand years ago. That's a good part of the reason why the dire predictions of mass starvation by Paul Ehrlich in his 1968 book *The Population Bomb* didn't come true.

Marc Roby: So, fulfilling the creation mandate is a good thing. But, of course, the Bible also tells us that studying creation should drive us to God himself.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. Studying creation should definitely drive us to God. How can you look at the beauty, immensity, and complexity manifest in nature without finding yourself in awe of the God who created it all? Psalm 19 famously begins, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard." (Ps 19:1-3)

Marc Roby: I love that psalm. And it goes on, after discussing creation in Verses 1-6, to talk about God's revelation in his Word.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. Verse 7 begins "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul." The "law" here really refers to all of Scripture. And, in the King James Version, it says "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul". It is speaking about the use of the Word of God in bringing about new birth and salvation, in other words conversion, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

We can learn a great deal about God from creation itself, but as we argued in Session 22, that knowledge is only sufficient to leave us without excuse. It should cause us to recognize that there is a God and to give him glory, thank him for life and all blessings, and seek to know and please him. But, the Bible is absolutely necessary for salvation and to live a life pleasing to God as we explained in Session 24.

Marc Roby: The central importance of the Word of God was emphasized by Christ himself as well. When Satan tempted him to turn stones into bread after 40 days of fasting in the desert Jesus replied, in Matthew 4:4, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Dr. Spencer: That is a great verse, and of course Jesus answered Satan's other temptations the same way, by quoting the Bible. So, his answers affirm that our Lord himself considered the Bible to be the infallible Word of God.

In addition, we should notice that Christ was quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, where Moses explained to the people that God had allowed them to experience hunger during the exodus so that they might learn that the Word of God is every bit as important for life as food. You can have physical life without the Word of God, but you cannot have spiritual life without it. And

when you deny the infallibility of the Bible, you deprive yourself of the Word of God because *you* are now the authority who must decide which parts of the Bible are his word.

Marc Roby: You have argued that the Bible is authoritative and infallible because it is the Word of God. But, in doing so, you *assumed* that God exists and that the Bible is his word. But, you often hear people say that we should read the Bible from a neutral point of view to see if it is true. How would you respond to that charge?

Dr. Spencer: I would respond as the great Old Testament Scholar E.J. Young did in his book *Thy Word is Truth*. He wrote that “There can be no neutral position. We believe that either God is our Creator and the One who alone gives meaning to all aspects of life, or that we are faced with the dismal gloom of relying upon the human mind as the ultimate point of reference and predication.”⁴

His language is a bit old fashioned here. To rely on “the human mind as the ultimate point of reference and predication” means to use our minds as the ultimate judge of what is true. Predication means to make a statement of fact about something.

Marc Roby: We all remember from grade-school grammar that a sentence has a subject and a predicate, and the predicate tells us something about the subject.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, and it’s the same root word. And Young’s point is very important. There is no neutral position. As we have argued many times before, there are only two possible ultimate authorities; either God’s revelation, or man’s reason. A Christian’s ultimate authority *must* be God’s revelation, which is only found in the Bible.

Marc Roby: Which, it is important to point out, is not *opposed* to reason in any way.

Dr. Spencer: That is important. And Young addresses that issue. He writes⁵ that when compared with the “crude polytheism of the Babylonian documents”, and the “pseudo-creation accounts of the ancient world, ... the Bible stands out like a fair flower in a dreary, barren desert.” And that when you look at man’s attempts to find some way to atone for his sins and then look to the Bible you see “How unspeakably grand is the doctrine of salvation by grace!”

Marc Roby: In other words, the Bible is its own best evidence once the Holy Spirit changes our hearts so that we receive it.

Dr. Spencer: The Bible is definitely its own best evidence. We spent a number of sessions looking at external evidence that corroborates the Bible, which is of great use to a Christian to bolster our faith. But, that is not the *basis* for our faith as we noted a number of times. If we have determined that the Bible is true *because* it conforms to some external standard, then the Bible itself is not be the ultimate standard, human reason is. You simply cannot escape from this choice.

⁴ E.J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth*, the Banner of Truth Trust, 2012, pg. 32

⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 33

Nevertheless, to believe the Bible is absolutely *not* belief without warrant, it is not a leap in the dark, it is belief that is entirely consistent with all evidence and logic. But, it *is* a belief that cannot be attained without new birth – sin blinds the unbeliever and prevents him from accepting what he knows to be true. So, as you said, the Holy Spirit must change our hearts so that we can receive the Word of God. Which is why the apostle Paul thanked God for doing this work in the Thessalonian church. In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 he wrote, “we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God”.

Marc Roby: But, we recognize that there are many professing Christians who do not agree that the Bible is the infallible Word of God. What would you say to them?

Dr. Spencer: I would say that we must be very careful about our salvation. It is the most important thing there is for us to consider because our eternal destiny is at stake. Perhaps you have been taught that the Bible is not God’s Word, but that it only contains God’s Word, or that it becomes God’s Word as you interact with it, or whatever. But you need to think that through very carefully. As we have been laboring to demonstrate, if you don’t believe that the Bible is entirely the infallible Word of God, then your faith is based on subjectivism. And, if that is the case, you may not have a biblical Christianity. You may be believing in a man-made substitute, which will not save you.

Marc Roby: That warning is very serious. In our last session you quote the theologian John Murray who wrote that one aspect of biblical faith is “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture as the Word of God.”⁶ And that this “is inseparable from a state of salvation.”⁷

Dr. Spencer: I understand that this may be a hard word for some people to hear, but Murray is exactly right. But, I also said that these statements are an expression of a mature faith that has been thought through. It is my hope that our listeners will think this through carefully, recognizing the extreme importance of the issue. If they do not find themselves agreeing with the Bible’s own declarations that it is the infallible Word of God, that is a strong indication that they may not be born again.

Marc Roby: That immediately brings Paul’s letter to the Galatians to mind, where he warned them, in Galatians 1:6-7, saying, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a very serious warning. But, there are many people today who are not turning away from the true gospel to a different gospel, they have simply never known anything

⁶ John Murray, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, pg. 241

⁷ *Ibid*, pg. 254

but a different gospel because they go to a church that doesn't preach the true gospel found in the Bible. And that is a very dangerous thing.

Marc Roby: Jesus Christ himself gave us a frightening warning in Matthew 7. In Verses 21-23 Jesus told the people that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Dr. Spencer: What a frightening passage. And doing the will of God certainly includes believing the gospel as it is presented to us in the Bible, not as it is distorted by some men. It is always important for us to remember that calling ourselves Christians will not save us. The only way I will be saved is if Jesus Christ owns me as his on that day.

So, one of our chief reasons for doing this podcast is to lay before people what the Bible itself says so that they can trust in the true gospel of grace.

Marc Roby: And there are many ways of twisting and perverting that gospel of grace and, thereby, turning it into a damnable man-made religion.

Dr. Spencer: And there are ditches on both sides of the road. On the one side of the road is the ditch of lawlessness. This is the common idea that because we are saved by grace our own works don't matter at all and we can go on living however we want to live so long as we once said "Jesus Christ is Lord." But this idea is completely foreign to the Bible. I *am* saved by grace alone; my own works are in no way at all meritorious and do not earn my salvation. But, if I have truly been saved, then I am, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, a new creation and, as he wrote in Ephesians 2:10, I have been "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for [me] to do."

Marc Roby: I love the way Paul puts it in Romans 1:5. In the Greek it says we have been called into the obedience of faith. Which makes it clear that true saving faith has obedience as a necessary concomitant.

Dr. Spencer: That is a great way to put it. Our works are necessary to prove that we are, in fact, new creations. So, our works are the evidence that we are truly born again, not the cause of our being born again. But, there is also a ditch on the other side of the road, and that is legalism; the idea that I can somehow earn my salvation by fulfilling the law. I think this view is also common today, but with a very defective sense of what it means to fulfill the law.

There are many professing Christians out there who think that they will be saved because they are, quote-unquote, good people who try to be kind to everyone and keep the Golden Rule. These people need to see their sin in all of its ugliness and, therefore, their true need for Christ and the biblical, gospel of grace.

Marc Roby: Which brings us back to the infallible Word of God.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. We need to understand what God has revealed in his Word about our sinful condition and what we must do to be saved. No plan conceived by man can save us, which is why the infallibility of the Bible is so important. If it isn't infallible, then we have no way to avoid the ditches on either side of the narrow path, we are bound to listen to the ideas of men instead of to God.

Marc Roby: Let me take a stab at stating your argument in a different way. If the Bible is not infallible, then the Bible is not the word of God; and if we do not have God's words, then we have nothing solid on which to base our supposed understanding of God, salvation, or anything else for that matter. To rule out an infallible Bible is to rule out the God of the Bible, which of course is what unbelieving man wants to do. Once we've 'X'd out God, then we can listen to and follow our own opinions and thoughts. But, we are warned twice in the book of Proverbs, in 14:12 and 16:25, that "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

Dr. Spencer: That is a very clear way to state the argument. E.J. Young wrote about this question of listening to God or man in *Thy Word is Truth*. He wrote, "Having their vision obscured by the dense fog that modern theology is casting over the way, many do not realize that there is a crossroad. They are not aware that they must decide which road they will follow. Unless something is done, they will travel on, taking the wrong turning, until the road leads them at last into the valley of lost hope and eternal death.

"Pray God that He will awaken His people from their slumber. Pray that He will warn them of the dangers that lie ahead in the forsaking of His Word."⁸

Marc Roby: And part of the dense cloud that modern theology produces is the misconstruing of what it means to be saved by grace as we just illustrated. We are praying that all of our listeners will choose the right path, meaning to trust the infallible Word of God as their ultimate standard for truth.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. And, we have already shown that Jesus Christ himself considered the Bible to be the infallible Word of God. So, it seems obvious that anyone who calls himself a Christian must do the same.

Marc Roby: That does seem reasonable. I look forward to getting into more biblical evidence for the infallibility of God's Word, but we are out of time for today. I'd like to remind our listeners that we would very much like to hear from them, and they can email their questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org.

⁸ Ibid, pg. 35